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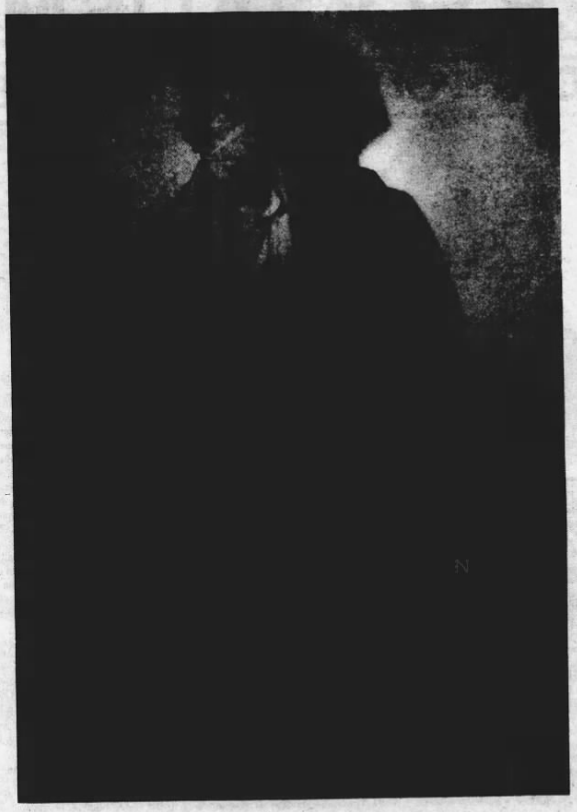

CLAUDE

by R. Meltzer

photo by Jules Bates

Q: *How did punk happen to enter your life?*

A: Well I wasn't listening to rock and roll in those days, with the exception of maybe John Cale, because nothing was fucking happening at all. I was just listening to reggae, which I'd discovered through my English girlfriend Philomena. I remember having 25 bucks and going to the record store and not being able to fucking spend it.

Then suddenly, incredibly, for the first time in my life, there was this music in which my "political," my "sociological," my "aesthetic" outlook finally blended with my pleasure and entertainment outlook. Before it had always been a dichotomy. I loved rasta music but of course I never swallowed that whole repatriation number. I did love a lot of the Beatles, Rolling Stones, but I never swallowed, y'know, *get down*. And I loved the blues and shit like that but I never felt like I was down and out in Chicago, looking for my baby. For the first time it all came together, my feelings towards society, towards everything around me, and the *sound* of it. I didn't have to pretend, suddenly it was the only way it could come out.

Q: *So when did you start writing?*

A: When I first came here in the late '60s there were some drugs people were taking that left you no alternative but to either write or endlessly doodle on a piece of paper. It was just totally self-oriented writing at first, pure mental doodles with absolutely no value whatsoever. But it made me use the words, especially since English wasn't my natural tongue. I started fucking around, spending hours in the dictionary. About a year and a half before *Slash* I started sending a few weird things to various so-called alternative, underground magazines, the kind of obscure things Bukowski and those people used to write for, various Canadian outlets, poetry mags, clique stuff. And I got rejected left and right, so I quickly brought the whole silly project to an end, I just went on being a waiter, a dishwasher. Until this *Slash* thing started, which suddenly, out of the blue, was my first and last chance to open my big mouth in a big way.

Q: *How'd the whole thing come to be?*

A: Well the guy who had the original idea, Steve Samiof, who was more or less into graphics at the time, called me up one day because he knew, vaguely, from a couple of conversations at parties, that I did write a bit. He always wanted to do a little publication and he had read a couple of papers about the punk explosion in England; he had heard a couple singles. So he said let's start a paper, we'll just get into a couple of outrageous numbers, we might even get an ad from A&M, based on pure luck, for some group they've got called Eddie and the Hotrods. So we got this one ad from A&M and another from I don't know where, which totally financed the first issue, which came out May Day, 1977. And by luck we ran into the Damned, who were doing their first concert here, for an interview in that issue.

For the first two or three issues we pretended there was an L.A. scene, when there was really nothing. But before we knew it the paper started interesting some kids, some bands started forming because of the paper, and before we knew it we had a scene to report on, it started snowballing. The media and the artist became very connected. We featured the Screamers on looks alone — we let them play the very first *Slash* concert before we had heard one note of their music — and it *worked*. Suddenly *Slash* was indispensable!

Q: *When did you realize that* Slash *was being perceived on a larger scale than just L.A.?*

A: I don't know, I guess it was about six or seven months ago. For quite a while we felt like we were screaming in the desert, we got such low-level feedback that we thought we were wasting our time. And then suddenly we got all these lame middle-of-the-road publications calling up all the time, wanting to know what the truth was. Like we were holding some secret and everybody wanted to pry us open like an oyster, to get the pearl.

Q: *How'd you come to start Catholic Discipline?*

A: I did it for personal reasons. Before I got too old I had to know what it felt like to be on the other side. You might also think there are things you would like to do that haven't been done but you give up on that naive concept very early, usually after gig number one, suddenly being on stage and coping with that PA and this musician and your pathetic lack of any kind of vocal talent. This is the only town where we could all look at each other — those people were my friends before they were in my band — and we knew in this town everything is possible, there's an opening for even the kind of shit we have vaguely in mind. Right now everybody's so confused with labels, so confused with what's hip, that no matter what off-the-wall, tinny, gigantic, pompous, humble sound you come up with you're gonna get a listen.

We have not that much of a bit of an intention to ever be a serious band, to ever record, to ever get serious bookings or whatever. We're doing it just for the fun of it, we've been canceling gigs more than we've been playing them. The second it stops being fun and kind of crazy and adventurous it just stops. ■

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